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ABSTRACT

The role and responsibilities of a principal as leader of a learning community within K-12 schools is undergoing dynamic evolution. This exploratory study describes and analyzes the professional growth of 18 educational practitioners while participating in a principal preparation cohort program. The study goal was to understand the nature of changes and the processes through which they occurred, and to link participants' professional growth to their readiness to assume school leadership positions. Researcher propositions guided the design and focus of this mixed-methods yearlong case study. Although the inquiry explores the preparation of educational leaders within a unique cohort of a university-based licensure program, the research was not intended to evaluate a particular program of principal preparation. Five themes emerged from the data that have implications for the preparation of new school leaders: (1) career aspirations; (2) leadership development; (3) role conceptualization into the principalship; (4) socialization into the community of practice; and (5) learning in cohorts. Experiential learning must be the core element of principal preparation to ensure needed skill development and socialization into the community practice. Career counseling is needed for aspiring principals, especially for women, to assist teachers as they make the transition from classrooms to administrative offices. (Contains 73 references.) (Author/RT)

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PREPARING SCHOOL LEADERS: CASE STUDY SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study describes and analyzes the professional growth of 18 educational practitioners while participating in a principal preparation cohort program. The goal of the study was to understand the nature of changes and the processes through which they occurred and to link participants' professional growth to their readiness to assume school leadership positions. Researcher propositions guided the design and focus of this mixed-methods yearlong case study. Although the inquiry explores the preparation of educational leaders within a unique cohort of a university-based licensure program, the purpose for the research was not intended to evaluate a particular program of principal preparation. Five themes emerged from the data that have implications for the preparation of new school leaders: (a) career aspirations, (b) leadership development, (c) role conceptualization into the principalship, (e) socialization into the community of practice, and (d) learning in cohorts.

PREPARING SCHOOL LEADERS: CASE STUDY SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Leading K-12 schools amid the current complexities of educational reform and paradigm shifts is challenging. The capacity of a school to respond appropriately to external change forces (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1998; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999) or to initiate and sustain self-renewal (Barth, 1990; Fullan, 1999; Schlechty, 1997, 2001) depends upon a principal's ability to address multiple, sometimes conflicting, issues. Additionally, research on high performing schools shows a direct link to effective principal leadership (ERS, NAESP, & NASSP, 2000).

Adding to the current complexities within K-12 schools is the dynamic evolution of a principal's role and responsibilities as the leader of a learning community (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Senge et al., 2000; Sergiovanni, 1994, 2001). Increased demands for teacher empowerment and shared school governance, renewed focus on instructional leadership, and expanded school functions based upon changing student populations and learner needs define new expectations for educational leaders and practitioners working in K-12 schools (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Levine, Lowe, Peterson, & Tenorio, 1995; Sergiovanni, 1992). Today's principals are "pulled in different directions and some are breaking under the stress" (Ripley, 1997, p. 55), and thus, the principal's role needs to be reconfigured or re-cultured (Murphy, 1998, 2001). This change "will both shape the organization and overhaul the system to meet the demands of a new social structure" (Murphy, 1998, p. 14).

Another emerging problem related to school leadership is finding talent: The current pool of educational practitioners willing to assume positions as school leaders is small (ERS, NAESP, & NASSP, 2000; Young, Peterson, & Short, 2001). As retirement rates of experienced principals increase and numbers of qualified applicants choosing to become school leaders decrease, the number of candidates available to fill open principal positions is shrinking.

During the last decade of the 20th century, leadership education associations and state committees developed professional standards for the preparation, licensure, and performance of school leaders (CCSSO, 1996; Sergiovanni, 2001). The introduction of new professional standards for licensed school leaders required many university-based programs to adopt standards-based curricula and modify program delivery formats (Jackson, 2001; Kelley &

Peterson, 2000; Murphy 1993). However, redesigning professional development programs for school principals in the midst of paradigm shifts is not easy (Milstein & Krueger, 1997). One reason is that district administrators often recruit potential candidates who fit profiles of the traditional principal (Cline & Necochea, 1997). Another reason is that many beginning principals report difficulty in balancing technical and managerial tasks while simultaneously performing as visionary instructional leaders (Daresh & Playko, 1997). Although administrative internships and mentoring programs for new principals have been added to many leadership development programs (Kelley & Peterson, 2000; Milstein & Krueger, 1997), research about the effectiveness of program redesigns is limited (Murphy, 1993).

Additionally, many university-based principal preparation programs deliver instruction through cohort models (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Kelley & Peterson, 2000; Milstein & Krueger, 1997). A premise for using cohorts is that keeping students together as a unique group of learners enhances professional learning and skill development (Norris & Barnett, 1994; Peel, Wallace, Buckner, Wrenn, & Evans, 1998). However, most research about educational leadership cohort programs is based upon anecdotal evidence collected from participants at the close of programs rather than during active participation in the cohort (Barnett & Muth, 2000).

This investigation explored professional growth of educational practitioners participating in a leadership preparation program. The study began concurrently with a new principal licensure cohort that was developed in partnership with a local education agency. Data were collected in real time as the students were actively engaged in learning and as the cohort transitioned through program stages. Because the investigation spanned one calendar year, changes in participants' insights and understandings as learners and as practitioners were traced. Further, this study was conducted as research to understand the nature of these changes and the processes through which they occurred, rather than to evaluate a particular program of principal preparation.

Findings from this exploratory study about practitioner growth emerged as five themes that link principal preparation to placement readiness: (a) career goals, (b) leadership self-awareness and understanding, (c) role conceptualization of the principalship, (d) socialization into

the community of practice, and (e) learning in cohorts. Each topic connects to other studies within the field and is important to the knowledge base concerning preparation of future school leaders.

Data collected during this study are being integrated with additional data collected over time from the same participants to explore transference of learning as students to professional practice as new school leaders. Additionally, data collection instruments developed in this study were used in other principal licensure cohorts within the same university-based program to generate a database for comparative studies. Although this study was not intended as an evaluation of the university-based principal licensure program in which the sample cohort was a part, conclusions and implications based upon these findings have potential value in the design of this and other educational leadership programs. Findings also have potential value to the broader body of knowledge about the recruitment and preparation of aspiring principals and the use of cohorts in higher education.

Context: The Licensure Cohort Program

Following the state adoption of professional standards in 1994, the educational administration faculty at an urban university in a western state progressively revised its principal preparation program to be problem-based (Ford, Martin, Muth, & Steinbrecher, 1997), oriented to active learning (Muth, 199) and portfolio-assessed (Muth, Murphy, Martin, & Sanders, 1996). The program also transformed from a series of on-campus courses into off-campus cohorts developed through school district partnerships.

Content Domains, Clinical Practice, and Technology Integration

The program is a sequence of four learning domains or "content umbrellas" (Muth, 2000, p. 60) that concentrate on specific areas of school administration and connect to concurrent field experiences. Each domain usually spans an entire semester but can be adapted to meet the needs of the partnering district and cohort members. Individual and group activities within the four domains focus on (a) educational leadership, (b) school environment, (c) supervision of curriculum and instruction, and (d) school improvement. Topics within the domains overlap both

to integrate subject matter across domains and to take advantage of cycles of events in schools relevant to the content and standards to be met.

Each domain has an integrated 45 clock-hour field-based experience that connects content to practice, and a 135 clock-hour practicum provides additional immersion into practice and experience as a school administrator. Content learning is balanced with field experiences in order for students to gain clinical skill in recognizing and solving problems of professional practice (Muth, forthcoming).

Adoption of the FirstClass Client telecommunication system by the university's school of education opened myriad opportunities to integrate online instruction and learning into the school's licensing programs. In addition to private electronic mail, the statewide online system "permits synchronous as well as asynchronous communications, easy file sharing, and Internet access" (Muth, 2000, p. 60) and allows creation of discussion sites known as conferences. Within unique cohort conferences, participants can post questions, comments, and responses viewed by all conference members. The electronic conferences provide an avenue for developing relationships outside the regularly scheduled cohort sessions and facilitating completion of special online projects.

Closed Cohort Structure

The faculty selected the closed cohort structure because it delivers instruction suited to the diverse needs of adults, fosters collegial learning, and increases student retention through empowering students (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Barnett & Muse, 1993; Reynolds, 1993 Teitel, 1995; Yerkes, Basom, Norris, & Barnett, 1995). A closed cohort keeps students together as a group throughout the entire program and provides opportunities for ongoing peer support and professional collegiality (Barnett, Basom, Yerkes, & Norris, 2000; Basom, Yerkes, Norris, & Barnett, 1995). Because most learning cohorts within the program are developed in partnership with local school districts, unique problems of practice emerge as potential projects and learning events (Martin, Ford, Murphy, & Muth, 1998). Cohort sessions are held at district sites and jointly taught by university professors and administrative practitioners.

Portfolio Assessment and Advancement

Mastery of learning is presented through defense of self-constructed portfolios that include artifacts created through cohort activities and students' professional experiences that link to specific benchmarks (Muth et al., 1996). Students who complete all licensing program requirements and successfully pass a state-required examination are eligible to receive a provisional state license as a school principal. Additionally, students participating in the licensing program can earn a Master of Arts (MA) or Educational Specialist (EdS) degree by completing nine additional credits of specified coursework beyond the required 31 credits (Muth, 2000).

Program Tenets

The curriculum integrates problem-based learning and action research, exploration of problems of practice through group projects, online mentoring and instruction, and personal reflection (Muth, forthcoming). The cohort structure provides an evolving, adaptable learning environment that allows participants to empower themselves through practical applications of knowledge and integration of personal and professional experiences in their own learning (Muth et al., 2001).

Sample Cohort: Case Study Participants

Twenty of the 22 original members of the cohort agreed at the orientation session in January 2000 to participate in the yearlong study. During the ensuing months, three students withdrew from the program for personal reasons; two of the three exiting students were study participants. At the close of data collection in December 2000, the cohort was composed of 19 students. Eighteen students completed both the pre-survey administered at the beginning of the licensure program and the post-survey distributed at the end of the third domain of study. Fifteen of the 18 participants (83%) consistently responded to all other data collection instruments administered throughout the study.

Demographics and Diversity

The participant group included seven men and eleven women, but it was not ethnically diverse. The only African American member of the cohort was a study participant, and one of the two students of Hispanic origin participated in the inquiry. The remaining students identified

themselves as Caucasian. Marital status was almost equally split: Eleven participants were married, and seven were single. Ten of the 18 study participants reported having children under the age of 18 living with them.

The cohort was diverse, however, in representation of public school districts and private schools. Five students held positions within the partnership district. The remaining 14 cohort members served as teachers or district-level coordinators in 8 other school districts and 2 private schools within the greater metropolitan area. One participant, a college instructor who had relocated from an eastern state, had no experience working in a K-12 setting in the western state.

Professional Experience

Professional experience within the field of education was quite diverse. When data collection began, two participants worked in elementary schools (including a Pre-K parochial school director), nine in middle schools (including one teacher on maternity leave), and four in high schools. Two other students were serving in district administrative positions; the former college instructor was not employed. Table 1 displays the cohort demographics and participant work experiences at the beginning of the study.

Table 1: Beginning Cohort Demographics and Participant Work Experience

Work* Experience Range (years)	Age Range (years)	Gender		Work Assignment or Experience** (January 2000)							
		F	M	K-12 Teacher			K-12 Administrator				Higher Education
				ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS	DO	
5 or fewer	24-60	2	4	1	4	1	-	-	-	-	-
6 to 10	32-42	3	2	-	3	1	-	-	-	1	-
11 to 20	32-44	4	1	-	2	2	-	-	-	1	-
Over 20	47-48	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1

*Total years experience working in the field of education
**Work assignment symbols: ES=elementary school, MS=middle school, HS=high school, DO=district office

At the midpoint of data collection, which was the beginning of a new school year, nine participants changed positions by (a) transferring to schools in different districts, (b) changing teaching assignments in the same schools, or (c) assuming or vacating positions of leadership. At the close of data collection, two participants were teaching in elementary schools (Pre-K director returned to the classroom), six in middle schools, and two in high schools. One high school teacher had been appointed as the principal of a new K-8 charter school. Another high school teacher and two middle school teachers served on their schools' administrative teams in

quasi-administrative positions with limited authority. Two cohort members continued working as district-level coordinators, and two others (teacher on maternity leave and former college instructor) remained full-time students. Table 2 displays the changes in work assignments (teacher to administrator or vice-versa) but does not reflect changes in teaching assignments or transfers to new districts.

Table 2: Closing Cohort Demographics and Participant Work Experience

Work* Experience Range (years)	Age Range (years)	Gender		Work Assignment or Experience** (December 2000)							
		F	M	K-12 Teacher			K-12 Administrator***				Higher Education
				ES	MS	HS	ES	MS	HS	DO	
5 or fewer	25-61	2	4	1	2	-	1	1	-	-	-
6 to 10	32-42	3	2	-	3	1	-	-	-	1	-
11 to 20	32-44	4	1	-	1	1	-	1	1	1	-
Over 20	47-49	2	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1

*Total years experience working in the field of education
**Work assignment symbols: ES=elementary school, MS=middle school, HS=high school, DO=district office
***Quasi-administrator positions (teachers on special assignment) until completion of licensure requirements

Educational Background and Aspirations

The highest degree of formal education completed by 12 study participants was a Baccalaureate degree. Six other participants had earned a Master's degree prior to enrolling in the cohort. All participants, except for one student already holding a Master's degree, reported goals of advancing their degree level through participation in the licensure program.

Investigating Practitioner Growth: Case Study Design

Transformation of student perceptions and understandings while participating in a leadership preparation program was the phenomenon of interest for this inquiry. The case study design was selected because the inquiry met two important criteria: The phenomenon studied was bound by a specific time period and encapsulated in a particular structure (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Data collection began at the orientation meeting of the cohort in January 2000 and continued through the last session of the third domain of coursework and the final informant interview in December 2000. The case was a unique cohort within an administrative preparation program, formed through a new university-school district partnership. The case study design provided an opportunity for interpretive analysis of practitioners' perspectives of their professional growth and their assessments of program effectiveness (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994).

Researcher Propositions

The primary investigator served as a design team member for a new graduate program for corporate trainers at the university and conducted an earlier pilot study about adult learning using that sample. Additionally, the researcher served as a research assistant and adjunct in the university's administrative licensure program. Thus, the design and focus of this investigation were guided by a set of researcher propositions (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995). One premise was that practitioners chose to participate in the preparation program to acquire basic knowledge and skills required for becoming school leaders. Therefore, as participants expanded their knowledge bases and applied skills in their professional practice, transformations would occur in their understandings and perceptions.

The second proposition for this study was that participants in the administrative licensure cohort would show evidence of their growth through self-reported changes in their perceptions about themselves as leaders and their understandings about leadership. Additionally, practitioner growth would become evident by changes in participants' (a) perceptions about the principalship and (b) professional behaviors that aligned with those of school leaders.

The final proposition was that various activities and assignments within the licensure program would provide stimuli for professional growth. Also, because participants remained together throughout the program as a unique group of learners, the learning environment of the closed cohort would also influence practitioner growth.

Data Sources

Data collection was triangulated through three different methods. First, practitioner perceptions and understandings were collected through pre- and post-surveys, four open-ended questionnaires, a series of three semi-structured interviews with five informants, and a closing focus-group interview with six participants. Participants coded each of their completed data collection instruments with a unique four-digit identification number; the coding process was maintained throughout data analysis in order to link participant identities with the time their responses were made and the dates of program events. All interviews were audio taped, professionally transcribed, and entered into a computer program for analysis. Evidence of

change emerged through comparisons of responses to identical questions posed at different times throughout the year on both instruments and during interviews. The interactions of focus group interviewees as they responded to researcher probes and comments made by their peers created a snapshot reflection of the cohort's history.

Second, researcher insights and understandings were developed as a participant-observer during 28 of the 37 cohort meetings held during the year. Field notes included charts of seating arrangements, arrival times of cohort members, and topics of discussion and class activities. The observations focused on how the cohort members changed over time in their relationships with one another and as a group, participation in class discussions and the content of their comments, and questions about their future responsibilities as school leaders.

The final data sources were artifacts generated during the year, which included (a) the cohort notebook distributed during orientation; (b) calendars and domain syllabi; and (c) assigned reading materials, class handouts, and other documents distributed during class meetings and generated electronically. Additionally, all 157 messages in the leadership subconference of the cohort conference within the university's online messaging system were printed and analyzed. This particular data source provided a rich context in which to explore early cohort interactions and developing peer relationships.

Access to conduct the study was open, encouraged by the cohort leader and supported by the instructors. Data collection instruments were transmitted as attachments to private electronic messages; participants returned completed instruments to the researcher at their discretion (via U.S. mail, return e-mail, or hand delivery at cohort sessions). Interviews were held at times and locations outside of cohort meetings. The identity of participants was not disclosed to the instructors or other cohort members, and every effort was made to maintain confidentiality of participants' responses.

Analysis Strategies

Data analyses drew primarily on case study methodologies (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994) and included triangulation of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, thus making this a mixed-model study (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Analysis of interview transcriptions,

questionnaire responses, and online interactions included qualitative strategies, grounded theory techniques, and content analysis (Kvale, 1996; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Weber, 1990). Multiple survey methodologies were used in the construction and analysis of the pre- and post-survey, including computation of magnitude of change over time ratios (Ary, Jacobs, & Razavieh, 1996; Fishel, 1998; Fowler, 1993, Krathwohl, 1998; Mahadevan, 2000).

Portions of both quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed by hand and by computer. Because the sample was small (n=18), analysis of demographic data and responses to yes-no questions was completed by hand. The results were compiled in a spreadsheet, and selected demographic data were transferred to attribute tables in quantitative and qualitative analysis software programs. All qualitative coding was completed using computer software. Analysis for evidence of change over time included individual participant growth, cross-set comparisons among participants, and total set.

Qualitative and quantitative methodologies were used to analyze changes in professional behaviors and attitudes about program effectiveness. Effect sizes were computed by comparing identical prompts on both surveys. Changes in professional behaviors were measured by effect size ratios and triangulated with participants' written responses to open-ended questions about professional behaviors. Effect sizes for program elements were triangulated with students' assessments of their program experiences and suggestions for improvement.

Standards of Quality and Verification

Multiple procedures were employed to ensure that the case study met standards of quality and verification (Creswell, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). Data collection was linked to the propositions guiding the study and spanned a range of historical, attitudinal, and behavioral issues. An organized system of data management was carefully constructed and employed so that a chain of evidence could be constructed. The breadth of data sources and the use of mixed methods during analysis supported multiple forms of triangulation. Informants conducted member checks of the full study report that included thick description in the participants' voice.

Complications and Limitations

Findings in this case study were potentially affected by two occurrences: (a) passage of an omnibus educational bill by the state's general assembly and (b) modification of the licensure program by the cohort leader. During the early months of data collection, the state's general assembly passed a sweeping education-reform bill that initiated dramatic changes to the system of public school accountability. Yearly high-stakes testing was expanded to all levels from third through tenth grade, and state-regulated school report cards were added. Data reflect reactions and concerns of the participants as they wrestled with the implications of the new policy on their current professional practices and their future responsibilities as school leaders.

Because the theme of study for the cohort was collaborative leadership, the cohort leader developed a unique action-learning project. Students were required to conduct research about collaboration in schools during the last two domains of their program. To provide time for the investigation, the cohort leader eliminated the concurrent field-based learning experiences in all domains. Thus, students in the sample cohort did not have program-supported opportunities to integrate content learning with ongoing clinical practice.

Case Study Summary: Findings and Implications

Data analysis indicated that transformations from teacher to principal were stimulated by a variety of catalysts. Evidence of change appeared in chunks of data that often emerged through patterns of comparison or through an unexpected event reported by a participant. In the following sections, findings are summarized within four sections based on the themes that emerged during the final analysis phase: (a) career aspirations, (b) leadership development, (c) role conceptualization and socialization, and (d) learning in the cohort. Related implications are presented within each subsection and linked to literature within each theme.

Career Aspirations

The first proposition for this inquiry was that students who enroll in principal licensure programs seek basic knowledge and skills that are needed to become school leaders. Findings about the influence of career aspirations of practitioner growth emerged serendipitously during the final phase of analysis. By comparing the participants' responses to the same question on

both the pre- and post-survey (*What prompted you to pursue licensure to become a school principal?)* and then analyzing composite responses for each participant, evidence emerged that definitive career aspirations influenced student learning.

Findings. Comparisons made between practitioners' initial and later purposes for pursuing licensure as a school administrator indicate that students who entered the program with clear aspirations committed time and energy to their learning. This evidence emerged by grouping the participants' paired responses into three disjoint sets determined by their indicated career goals two years following the close of this study. The students separated themselves into groups of practitioners who hoped (a) to become school principals or assistant principals or (b) district administrators, or who were (c) not sure of their career plans at the close of the study.

Participant responses to prompts and interview questions were compiled into one data source for each student. Tracing their reflections over time suggested that students who defined and maintained clear career goals throughout the study received the greatest self-perceived benefits from the program. Many students in this group reported receiving encouragement from their principals or sponsors, and several sought opportunities outside of the program to engage in field-based learning experiences. The story of one participant's professional growth describes how career aspirations are influenced by many factors outside the preparation program.

"Pursuit of leadership and responsibility" was the reason this middle school teacher gave in January when asked why she aspired to earn licensure as a school principal. Six months later, she assumed a position on the leadership team of the school where she had been teaching for many years. At the beginning of the new school year in August, she shared reflections about her new responsibilities as the site coordinator of teacher interns in her school: "I have insecurities, but I have been forced to lead by my [new] position. I enjoy the challenge, but I have a long way to go before I feel I am an effective leader."

On the fourth open-ended questionnaire distributed in mid-October, this question was posed: *If you received a phone call today to become a school principal tomorrow, would you accept the position?* The same participant wrote, "Yes, but with much apprehension and a humble attitude. I am ready to take on the leadership role, but . . . I would still be learning as I

took on this position" [underlined emphasis provided by respondent]. Then at the end of November, she answered another probe about what prompted her decision to seek licensure as a school administrator:

> During my professional career, principals and some teachers have said I should become a principal. I did not have the confidence or even the desire while I was still enthusiastic in the classroom. My current principal gave me specific reasons and encouraged me--relentlessly! . . . I am gaining confidence, but I would like to be an assistant principal first, learning and practicing leadership with a mentor.

Her principal did more than encourage "relentlessly!" She nominated this teacher to participate in the licensure program and then supported her nominee by providing ongoing opportunities for professional growth, including appointing the teacher to a quasi-administrative position of the school's leadership team.

At the close of the study, only 7 of the 18 (39%) respondents indicated that they planned to seek positions as a school principal within two years of completing the program. Two other students of the 18 (11%) identified becoming an assistant principal as their next career goal.

Implications. Educators' aspirations have implications for the recruitment and selection of program participants, and thus, careful review of applicants' purposes for seeking admission to principal preparation programs is important. Milstein and Krueger (1997) assessed the current status of administrator preparation and offered suggestions for program improvements. They identified the recruitment and selection of candidates as critically important processes because a laissez-faire approach to student admission is destructive to the profession and the reputation of programs. If accountability policies are enacted that measure the effectiveness of principal licensure programs based upon performance on job (Barnett & Muth, 2000), issues of candidate recruitment and selection become critical.

Current literature suggests that the pool of qualified candidates for the principalship is shrinking (Copeland, 2001; Kelley & Peterson, 2000), but little empirical evidence about the causes for the trend is available. Studies have found links between career aspirations and career paths in educational administration (Begley, Campbell-Evans, & Brownridge, 1990; Merrill & Pounder, 1999; Pavan, 1987; Whitcombe, 1979). Hamilton, Ross, Steinbach, and Leithwood (1996) posit that career aspiration and encouragement by others prior to and during preservice

training increases placement rates as administrators after initial training. More research is needed, nonetheless, to determine the importance of career aspirations in the preparation of school leaders.

Leadership Development

A second assumption for this inquiry was that, as learners expand their knowledge base and apply skills in their professional practice, their personal transformation and acculturation elicits insights about the principalship. This assumption guided the search for evidence of professional growth through personal transformations (self-reported changes in participants' self-awareness as leaders and understanding about leadership) and through acculturation (self-reported changes in participants' perception of the principalship and professional behaviors). This section focuses on respondents' self-awareness of leadership ability and understandings about leadership; role conceptualization and socialization are presented in the next section.

Findings. Participants' personal transformations became explicit through their reported self-discoveries of core values and educational convictions, raised to a level of consciousness by reflective writing. Students identified cohort activities and assignments that expanded their understandings about leadership and, thus, stimulated their self-awareness of leadership potential. Most participants cited developing the reflective portion of their leadership plans as the greatest influence in self-discovery. Developing a passion statement and engaging in online reflective sharing with peers also encouraged personal transformations for some.

At the close of the study, all 18 participants responded "yes" to the prompt, *Are you a leader?* Only one student, however, admitted that he did not perceive of himself as a leader prior to enrolling in the program. He was among the more experienced teachers in the cohort, involved in a variety of school and community-based activities for children and youths. His busy personal and professional life and the demands of the preparation program created tremendous time management problems for him. Nonetheless, he responded to all questionnaires, sharing an emergent perspective about his understanding of leadership and his potential as a leader. As the study progressed, his written statements became deeply reflective, filled with candor about his growing confidence to assume leadership positions at his school and in community groups. By

combining his responses to several prompts about leadership, a pattern of growth emerged. In March he wrote,

> I am learning now that any person can be a leader. A leader is not a magical person. A leader is a person who has a passion about something and is willing to do anything to make it work. . . . I think up to this point I am a quiet leader. I have always tried to lead by example. Some of my colleagues understand me, and others ignore me. I have developed strong beliefs about what is right and wrong, what the needs of children are. I think it is time to quit sitting on my hands and start putting these ideas into action.

When the new school year began in August, he continued to describe himself as a "quiet leader" dedicated to the needs of children. However, his words reflected a decision to be more action-oriented through relationship building.

> I have learned that leadership is not an easy task. I can have great ideas about where I want to go, but I also must have a staff with me that will accept my ideas. . . . My desire to put my ideas into action [is stimulating my learning about leadership]. As I get [further] along in my career, I have opinions and ideas about how I think a school can be more effective. I would really like to see some of these ideas happen. . . . I am a quiet leader. I do not engage in lengthy conversation with peers. I am not a person to talk 'theory.' I am a realistic, concerned-about-students type of leader. I think one of the most important things we can do is to build relationships.

In the post-survey administered in November, cohort members were asked to reflect about their learning during the program. The same participant responded,

> I learned that leaders are people who believe in themselves and work to make their visions into realities. I realized through cohort activities that my thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and worries are similar to others. If they can lead, then so can I.

Then, in another response on the final survey, he further demonstrated his newfound confidence as a leader.

> At this point, I feel good about my ability, but I have not had the opportunity to demonstrate it. I have taken on leadership positions since I started the program. I am currently a board member of [a community organization] and have had the opportunity to apply techniques I have learned. . . . I believe in myself as a leader.

Two other participants in the study, who entered the program with prior leadership experiences and clear career goals, reported that their self-perceptions as leaders did not change as a result of participating in the preparation program. The first teacher, who was nominated to the program by both his principal and the district superintendent, had clear purposes for being in the program: to earn a master's degree and licensure as a school principal. He had worked in other professions prior to entering teaching and had grown up in the school district where he taught, maintaining strong connections to the community. He displayed an assured and

unflappable temperament, perhaps developed during his years in law enforcement. His caring spirit for humanity was easily discerned in his speech and behavior. However, he made no pretense about his forthright assessment of his leadership abilities:

> I believe that I am a good leader. Sometimes I am hardheaded and ambitious, but the bottom line with me is kids, so I try to promote that part as much as possible. . . . I believe I am a very good leader at facilitating and focusing the task at hand and utilizing the gifts and talents of those around me.

Even at the close of the study, he reiterated his self-awareness of his leadership skills and how participation in the program had affected him. During his final interview and in responses written on the final survey, he continued to assert that he was already a leader.

> Not trying to be bold, but I am a leader. The fact that people often look to me for leadership is hard because I do not have the answers; however, I seem to find a path that puts us in the right direction. . . . [Participating in the program] has helped me to groom my skills and start focusing on my future. In some regards, it has opened my mind to the diversity of ideas that exit, . . . [however] my definition of leadership, what I want to accomplish, hasn't changed.

The second teacher whose self-perception as a leader never changed during the preparation program was also an athletic coach. She called herself an "in the know" teacher because over the ten years that she had taught, she developed an expansive network with fellow educators throughout the state. Although somewhat quiet during class, she spoke with authority whenever she contributed to discussions. Unlike her fellow colleague in the cohort who described his leadership expertise based upon experience, her assessments about herself as a leader were based upon action. Her responses to questions about leadership on the first questionnaire in March reflect her action orientation and self-assurance.

> I consider myself a leader because I am an initiator [who is] self-motivated and consistent. I follow through with projects. I believe in myself. . . . I don't think there is anything [in the program] to stimulate my thinking--I am just that way. . . . [I am learning] that it is important to know who you are, what you value and how your values affect your leadership style. It is exciting to be with peers that have similar values and want to make a difference in education.

During her first interview in early May, she again described herself as a leader through her actions as a mentor for other teachers, a member of district-level committees, and a team member of a district instructional group. When asked to share how the preparation program changed her definition of leadership, she stated: "I don't think it has changed. I may think more about my core values, which I never really thought about before. . . . My definition [of leadership]

didn't change." Throughout the remainder of the study, her responses to prompts about leadership on questionnaires and during interviews remained consistently similar to her earlier ones. When the participants were asked at the close of the study what more they needed to learn in order *to feel competent, confident and comfortable to lead a school*, this middle school teacher replied succinctly, "At this point I would feel comfortable in the position. I feel I'm just doing my time."

Most participants, regardless of prior leadership experiences, admitted that they developed new understandings about leadership while participating in the licensure program. However, several students voiced concerns about the content presented in the leadership domain: They believed that important elements of leadership development had been omitted due to the cohort's focus on collaborative leadership.

During the final series of interviews, each informant was asked to clarify comments made sometime earlier in the study. One participant expressed her views during the summer that the leadership domain was too short. In November she elaborated further about her concerns.

> The most important position that principals [assume] is that of instructional leader. They're going to have influence over people. If they don't really understand the different techniques to use with people, then they're still missing a critical piece. You can understand curriculum and law and finance, but if you don't have the most important piece under your belt, you're still lacking. . . . [The study of] leadership should be ongoing, should never stop. . . . To me it should be something like an internship: It goes all year long and you discuss it constantly.

As our interview continued, the topic of principal burnout arose. She shared that principals in both public and private schools had discouraged her from assuming a principalship. Then she talked about observing a district-level principal meeting that prompted a new concern about her leadership preparation.

> I don't think that in the leadership domain we had enough [practice to be] able to make decisions quickly, to put groups of people into processes where they think and brainstorm. I don't feel adequate to do that. . . . I'm not in a hurry to graduate. Do I sit through another leadership cohort? What do I do?

A second informant, who was trained in strategies to facilitate meetings, echoed her colleague's concerns during her final interview. She shared her ideas about the practical tools that principals need to know in order to be effective leaders. During earlier interviews she talked about the committees she had chaired and the skills she had developed as a meeting facilitator.

During her final interview, she shared her belief that the leadership domain failed to provide important skills development.

> I think this [cohort] is still missing something about leadership. I think we understand law, finance, curriculum and instruction, but as far as leading, I think there's something missing. We could have [learned] how, as a leader, you develop norms as a group and facilitate a meeting. I think those are leadership qualities that should fall under the leadership domain. I don't think we covered [topics like], How do you stay focused on an agenda? How do you not go out on tangents? I think those are things that needed to be addressed that weren't addressed.

References to collaboration and collaborative leadership were woven into participants' responses throughout the study. While many participants seriously doubted the reality of being able to change the principalship, others expressed hope that the principalship can be restructured to spread responsibilities throughout the school community. An experienced practitioner expressed her disappointment that an original cohort focus, restructuring the principalship, had not been fully developed.

> In the beginning of the cohort, I believed that we were all trying to find new ways to look at [the principal] position that is obviously high in stress and demands. Lately, I believe that we are not looking at it in that same vein, that we are back to the traditional model. That is disappointing to me and makes me feel out of sync with the group at times. I understand the traditional roles and responsibilities; I would like to think about new ones and begin to live in that thought process.

Implications. Development of leadership talent is an important outcome for principal preparation programs, and thus, candidate identification and preparation needs to begin prior to program admission (Greenfield, 1975; Milstein & Krueger, 1997). Career-ladder positions, administrative internships, leadership training programs, and principal shadowing opportunities for talented teachers prior to admission to a principal licensure program are recommended (Crow & Glascock, 1995; Yerkes & Guaglianone, 1998). A tension arises, however, in identifying and mentoring teachers as potential candidates for the principalship: By nurturing leadership qualities in teachers to groom them for future administrative positions at other schools, principals lose valued teacher-leaders in their own schools (Ripley, 1997).

Another important component of educational leadership development is program curriculum and pedagogy. Stein (1998) advocates situated learning in classrooms where adult learners engage in simulated group activities, group discussions, and critical reflection where they can verbalize knowledge gained and engage in problem-solving approaches with experts in the

field. Content, context, community, and participation are the main elements of situated cognition and collaborative classrooms for adult learners (Stein, 1998).

Preservice training for principals must include group-processing skills, problem-solving strategies, and problem-based learning (Lumsden, 1992). Bridges and Hallinger (1997) identify numerous student benefits from problem-based learning, in particular, mastery of leadership skills and ability to make more informed decisions about being a school leader. Based upon an extensive literature base, Muth et al. (2001) constructed a learning-oriented programming model in which deliberative action, reflective practice, and lifelong learning are outcomes for graduates of principal licensing programs. Kelley and Peterson (2000) posit that leadership development includes "recruitment to the profession, early preparation and licensure, recruitment and selection to a district and placement in a school, ongoing evaluation and supervision and coaching, and continuous career-long professional development" (p. 20).

Based upon the literature and findings in this study, identification and recruitment of candidates by educational administrators is a critical component of principal preparation. Administrative leadership programs need to engage all students, even those with prior leadership experiences, in meaningful learning activities and skills development that mirror the work of today's principals and tomorrow's school leaders. Additionally, findings from longitudinal studies that trace career paths of program graduates would provide additional information about the effectiveness of leadership development for educational administrators.

Role Conceptualization and Socialization

The second study proposition also premised that acculturation into the principalship is an outcome of participation in a principal licensure program. The assumption was that, as learners expand their knowledge base, changes occur in their role conception of the principalship and in their professional behaviors.

This third section presents findings about the participants' understandings about the position many hoped to assume and about self-reported changes in their professional behaviors. An unexpected finding, role-identity transformation through a new mindset, emerged from the data and is included in this section. Findings within this theme are grouped into subheadings

labeled (a) role conceptions, (b) professional behaviors, and (c) role identity. Implications related to role conceptualization and socialization are presented as a whole at the end of the section.

Findings: Role conceptions. Professional growth in this context is described in relation to practitioners' understandings about the roles and responsibilities of a school principal, most noticeably based on participants' years in the field. Experienced educational practitioners, who understand the complex nature of work in schools as evidenced through their reflections and responses, held broader perceptions about what a principal does than did less experienced teachers. Evidence of the differing views emerged by grouping participants' descriptions of a principal's actions, attributes, and roles into sets according to respondents' teaching experience: (a) 5 or fewer years, (b) 6 to 10 years, (c) 11 to 20 years, and (d) over 20 years. Initial responses were displayed in four separate tables, and then role descriptors from all four subgroups were compiled into a single display (Table 3) for additional analysis. Comparative analysis indicated that few common role conceptions were found within all four sets of data. In addition to a lack of consensus about a principal's role or responsibilities, data further indicated that no discernible change in students' perceptions about the principalship occurred while participating in the administrative licensure program.

Table 3: The Principalship: Comparison of Role Conceptions

Role Descriptors Used by Teachers in Four Subgroups Based upon Years of Experience			
5 or fewer Years	6 to 10 Years	11 to 20 Years	Over 20 Years
A principal is a(n):	A principal is a(n):	A principal is a(n):	A principal is a(n):
Assessor	Advocate	Communicator	Decision maker
Decision maker	Coach	Evaluator	Facilitator
Disciplinarian	Communicator	Facilitator	
Educator	Director	Friend	
Facilitator	Educator	Implementor of new programs	
Goal setter	Evaluator	Instructional leader	
Leader	Facilitator	Motivator	
Organizer	Leader	Visionary	
Resource person	Mediator		
Role model	Organizer		
Visionary	Problem solver		
	Role model		
	Supporter		
	Visionary		

However, other interesting findings related to role conceptualization did emerge. Differences in age and experience appeared to influence practitioners' role conceptualization of the principalship and their projected career paths. The age span between the youngest (age 25) and oldest (age 61) members of the cohort was 36 years. Further, the difference in years of experience in the field of education was 25 years. Some students were completing only their third year of teaching at the close of the study, while others had acquired 27 or more years of experience. Some respondents cited youth, inexperience, and gender as perceived stumbling blocks to their assuming a principalship soon after completing their preparation program.

Age and inexperience as stumbling block. Among the youngest members of the cohort, both male and female, age was an expressed concern about opportunities for being hired or accepted as a school principal. The youngest male participant shared his assessment in a response written on a questionnaire administered in March.

> People have told me I would make a good leader because of my ability to work with a lot of people. I consider myself an emerging leader. My age (25) and my inexperience leave me with a lot to learn, although I am eager to learn.

His perception became a reality for him. Although he was appointed to a quasi-assistant principal position during the summer, he was passed over for promotion to a principalship the following spring because he lacked sufficient experience as an educational practitioner.

Gender as stumbling block. The youngest female member of the cohort also believed that age and inexperience would hamper her promotion to a principalship. While the novice teacher expressed confidence in being able to work effectively, she believed she faced somewhat insurmountable roadblocks.

On the first survey administered in January, she wrote, "My inexperience (few years of teaching) is a hindrance to my professionalism." Then on the questionnaire administered in March, she described what she learned from a past experience as a participant in a school leadership group.

> As part of a middle school team, I am the only female teacher. I am younger and willing to serve as a voice for the children of our school. I am repeatedly struggling with other teachers [for them] to hear or see the students' point of view. I have learned to stand my ground.

As the study progressed, however, she seemed to lose her earlier bravado. First, she purposefully sought a new teaching assignment at a different school during the summer. Then, when reflecting in October about her response to the first online leadership activity, she wrote: "I struggled with this assignment because I truly did not see myself as a leader. I was apprehensive to put those words online for all to read." Her reticence to share her thoughts with her peers was also evident during cohort sessions; she rarely engaged in whole group discussions.

On the closing survey, she described the professional hardships she experienced while participating in the preparation program: "I struggle with balancing my life as a teacher and a future principal. I find myself being pulled in two directions: I want to succeed as a teacher and a soon-to-be principal." She also shared her dilemma with some of her cohort peers during the focus group interview.

> I think as a principal, you have to pay your dues as a teacher in order to get respect . . . I'm young and I'm a female. I mean there's all these different elements. I'm not married, and I don't have a family. I need to go through all of that to earn the respect I think teachers will give you because you've "been there," because you've been "in the trenches."

Summary. Data collected about the participants' role conceptions of the principalship indicated that some students perceived that their youthful age and gender created stumbling blocks for them as aspiring principals. Further, several cohort members cited limited teaching experience as a reason why they did not plan to seek administrative positions immediately after completion of the state licensure requirements. These findings about role conceptualization of the principalship suggest important implications for identifying potential principal candidates and integrating clinical experiences into principal preparation programs.

Findings: Professional behaviors. Practitioner growth as measured through changes in professional behaviors became evident by comparing participants' responses to initial and closing self-assessment inventories, presented as 36 identical statements on the pre- and post-survey. Most statements on the inventory linked to the state's six professional standards for school administrators but focused only on actions that teachers also perform. The initial responses were treated as the control group, and the closing responses served as the treatment group in the

computation of effect size for each inventory item. Descriptive statistics were also computed for each statement.

The effect size values on nearly half (44%) the inventory items indicated that the changes in professional behaviors ranged from medium to large. Approximately one-third (36%) of the effect size values fell within the small range. Although the effect size for 7 of 36 (19%) inventory items suggested no significant change, analysis of descriptive statistics for several inventory items indicated high incidences of selected professional behaviors prior to enrolling in the licensure program.

Data reflect that working with educational administrators stimulated the adoption of new professional behaviors. Participants' answers on open-ended questionnaires and comments during interviews indicated that students who engaged in ongoing clinical experiences began transferring their learning about school leadership to their current practice as teacher leaders or as acting administrators. In many cases the reported changes in professional behaviors occurred as result of activities initiated by the learners or supported by their supervisors, rather than through program-developed activities. Most cohort members who worked in district positions or assumed administrative roles were also actively engaged in their clinical practicums during the fall semester (third domain). They seemed to grab opportunities whenever possible to socialize with school principals and engage in acculturation activities, as reflected in their comments:

A classroom teacher, who assumed responsibilities as the acting principal when the administrators were out of the building, wrote that he mentored "several teachers about ways to resolve a variety of issues." Afterwards, he met "with [his] principal or assistant principal to discuss the issues and seek other solutions."

A district coordinator in the cohort observed and socialized with principals in the field. She described the additional activities she employed to prepare herself for a principalship.

> I spend additional time visiting and shadowing administrators when I am in their building [in order] to learn more each time I am there. I also told them that I am studying to be a principal, and they have willingly shared administrative information with me, knowing where I have set my goals.

Another district coordinator shared the various activities outside the program in which she engaged to further her acculturation into the principalship: "spending time with building principals,

attending conferences on school leadership and school improvement." She stated that she looked for "opportunities to integrate the [professional] benchmarks into my work activities."

Socialization into the principalship began for students who spent time in community with experienced educational leaders. Data related to this proposition indicate the critical importance of extensive acculturation opportunities during principal preparation: Greater transference of theory to practice emerged when students socialize and interact with school principals.

Findings: Role identity. One of the most interesting evidences of professional growth from an interpretivist perspective was the mindset shift reported by several study participants. When the final open-ended questionnaire was administered in late October, the participants had reached the mid-point in their licensure program. They were asked if they had begun to *think like a principal or administrator* and, if so, to explain when they noticed this change. The range of answers was intriguing, including two that used articles of clothing as metaphors.

A high school teacher wrote simply, "Yes, I have a 'new pair of glasses' when it comes to the magnitude of what we have to do." An elementary teacher explained, "I have begun to think like a principal. I am anxious to use my classroom experience in a true setting. I put myself in the principal's shoes to see what I would have done had I been leading." A third participant shared, "When making personal decisions, I have begun to take time to view the situations from various perspectives. I feel a bit more open to various possibilities and solutions, as well as listening and requesting other views."

One of the acting assistant principals wrote a lengthy response to the question. He described how the change had begun to occur during the previous year when he was still a classroom teacher. He believed that his mindset shifted when he realized that others viewed him differently.

> Last school year it became apparent to me that I was thinking more like an administrator than a teacher. I was very involved in different school activities and was already seen as a leader throughout the staff. When people see you as a leader or ask for your guidance, you start to feel like an administrator. I think the change in my perspective came as a result of the way other people saw me.

For another cohort member, however, the changed mindset occurred first from his perceiving himself as an educational leader and then from being selected as a charter school

principal. His new frame of mind was enhanced further by the way administrators treated him as a peer.

> Oh, yes! I feel that in many ways I was made to be an educational leader. I love the cerebral challenge and the practical impact. I feel like I am able to make a difference as well as make a significant contribution to society. I began to notice this reality [first when I was writing my leadership plan and] . . . second, when cooperating administrators began to treat me as a peer. When administrators tutored me as I completed fieldwork, they empowered me [to] see education from the leadership perspective. I like the view!

During the focus-group interview at the close of the study, cohort members shared a variety of personal stories about how they had grown professionally during the past year. One student disclosed how taking the initial step of enrolling in the licensure program was the beginning point of her transformation. Others talked about seeking new positions as evidence of their growth as educational practitioners. Discussion followed about how various program activities and assignments, such as developing a leadership plan and writing reflectively, had stimulated growth. Then, a comment turned the conversation in another direction. A portion of the focus group interview transcription follows. The actual names of the students are not given.

> Jared: There's another thing that my principal has mentioned to me. She said there will come a time in your life when you know that you are no longer a teacher and that you are an administrator. At the time she said that, I thought, "No, I wasn't there, I wasn't there." But now that I look back, I can pinpoint that time as being the middle of this past summer: It's not that I didn't think of myself of a teacher, but I saw myself in a different role. It was an ideology or paradigm shift that helped me to see myself in that new perspective, which led to my professional growth. . . . I'd say the shift came [mostly] from me, just the way I viewed myself.
>
> Eunice: I feel like I have a split image. [laughter] I really do. No, I don't think of myself as a teacher as much anymore. But, you know, there's a part of me saying goodbye to that. And that's a little bit sad. I don't know if any of you have experienced that.
>
> Jared: Even my principal says she can tell that it's hard for me to give up teaching and being in the classroom. Occasionally, I sneak back into the classroom, not sneak per se, but have gone back to work with my old teaching teammates, helped out by teaching lessons and [things] like that. I think you have to let go and say goodbye to teaching. I don't see myself ever going back into the classroom, but I see myself missing some of those things.

Not all participants in the focus group, however, were ready to leave the classroom. A teacher who had transferred to another district talked about the outcomes of her decision to change schools. She explained that over the previous eight years, she felt compelled to "water down" the curriculum to meet the needs of her students. Now at a new school in a different

district, she felt that she was finally able to be the teacher she had dreamed of being. When asked if she had experienced a mindset shift, she replied, "No, I'm still driven by teaching."

Developing a new role identity is highly personal. Some participants experienced the transformation prior to enrolling in the preparation program, and others experienced it during their program. For a few, a new frame of reference as a school leader had not occurred after a year of participating in the program.

Implications. Findings from this study indicate that teachers' experiences in leadership positions prior to the program affected their role conceptualization about the principalship and influenced socialization. Participants who reported involvement in district or school committees had broader understanding about the nature of work in schools than their cohort peers who had not been involved in activities outside of classrooms. Interactions with teachers in other grades or disciplines and with school administrators helped teachers broaden their perspectives about school leadership. Similar findings emerged in a study conducted by Hamilton et al. (1996).

Because state admission requirements to principal preparation programs differ (Kelley & Peterson, 2000), experience as teachers may vary considerably among program participants. Hence, students enrolled in principal preparation programs need opportunities to conceptualize the principalship through socialization with practicing principals and with aspiring principals (Lumsden, 1992; Milstein & Krueger, 1997). Research shows that socialization through clinical practicums and internships increases role clarification and technical expertise, changes role conception about the principalship, and develops leadership skills and professional behaviors (Cordeiro & Smith-Sloan, 1995; Daresh & Playko, 1997; White & Crow, 1993).

While reading and discussing leadership theory expands knowledge bases, students engaged in principal preparation programs need opportunities to develop administrative skills in authentic settings (Lumsden, 1992; Milstein & Krueger, 1997). Effective programs are characterized by "significant coherence in curriculum, pedagogy, structure, and staffing" (Kelley & Peterson, 2000, p. 37), with the experiential component viewed as the core. Findings in this study support the importance of integrating classroom activities and field-based learning as strategies for developing role conceptualization and socialization.

Additionally, data from this investigation support other research findings about career objectives based on gender differences. In a study comparing career patterns of male and female teachers, aged 25 to 55 years, Whitcombe (1979) found several major differences. Men pursued a more aggressive approach to career planning and advancement and took advantage of inservice courses more often than women. While parenthood did not affect career advancement for men, it negatively influenced promotion eligibility for women due to career breaks for child rearing. Seven of the 18 participants in this study were male; six of the seven males had been teachers for less than eight years, making them less-experienced practitioners than their female peers in the cohort. Most male students in the group entered the program with clear objectives and sought opportunities to engage in socialization and career-development more often than the female students. Further, male participants did not identify gender or parenthood as hindrances to their career advancement, and they reported role-identity transformation more often than their female peers did.

According to Crow and Glascock (1995), role-identity transference from teacher to principal is a critical component of success as a school leader. A teacher moving to an administrative position must relinquish a comfortable mindset, experience a modification of self-esteem as a novice, and learn new behaviors as an expert. Crow and Glascock found this to be difficult for some highly qualified candidates in a nontraditional principal preparation program for women and minorities. Like some participants in their study, some participants in this study also struggled with role-identity transition. Coincidentally, the focus group participant who stated explicitly that becoming a school principal was not a career goal was the only African-American member of the sample cohort, who also was female.

Alley and MacDonald (1997) also explored role identity through career-development. In their study of women administrators, they found that developing a new self-conception as the principal was key to bridging the transition from teacher to administrator. However, Ripley (1997) suggests that difficulties with role conceptualization and identity emerge from the differences between masculine and feminine styles of leadership. Because men hold the vast majority of educational leadership positions, the career-ladder model is a masculine strategy.

Another consideration in role conceptualization and socialization into the principalship is education's changing context, resulting in new expectations about school leadership (Barth, 1990; Deal & Peterson, 1999, DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Sergiovanni, 1992). As educational practitioners themselves, students in principal preparation programs face the reality of complex pressures in schools in their own practice and observe the demands on their principals.

Based upon the findings in this study and a review of recent literature about educational administration, implications for role conceptualization of the principalship and socialization of aspiring principals into the community of practice appear overwhelming. Multiple forces are requiring the principalship to change, creating tension and stress on today's school leaders and teachers; thus, preparation programs must engage students in professional training that will prepare them to be effective educational leaders in dynamically changing settings.

Further, research on effective administration preparation programs indicates that experiential learning is a critical element in the professional development of new principals (Kelley & Peterson, 2000; Milstein & Krueger, 1997). Whether learning in the classroom or learning in the field, students need to be engaged in activities that develop the types of intellectual, social, reflective, technical, and personal skills required by school principals (Murphy, 1998; Ripley, 1997). Therefore, partnerships between university educators and educational administrators in the design and delivery of principal preparation programs are important.

One noticeable omission in discussions about principal preparation programs is career counseling. While careful recruitment and selection of candidates may improve post-graduate placement rates, aspiring and incumbent principals need assistance through the stages of role identity, career transition, and acculturation (Cordeiro & Smith-Sloan, 1995; Daresh & Playko, 1997; Sigford, 1998; White & Crow, 1993). Women in education tend to move into positions of leadership later than men do and, thus, women particularly need assistance in developing career paths (Alley & MacDonald, 1997; Chen, 1991; Whitcombe, 1979). Adding career counseling and guidance for teachers in principal licensing programs is one implication emerging from this finding. Additionally, research on the career paths of program graduates is needed to inform the field about the reasons for non-placement as school principals.

Learning in the Cohort

A final proposition for this case study was that programs delivered through a cohort model provide stimuli for professional growth. The closed cohort used as the case in this study was developed in partnership with an urban school district with the goal of exploring collaborative leadership.

Findings. Students identified teamwork and camaraderie, peer interaction and collegial support, and professional relationships and networking as important benefits of their cohort experience. Many reported that learning in a cohort was positive for them and that they would want to participate in another cohort program if they furthered their education. When asked to share their perceptions about the advantages of learning in a cohort, one student elaborated upon how time allowed them to develop relationships based upon candidness.

> I felt that having the closed cohort idea allowed us to have candid conversations. If we switched classmates every semester, we would go through that period of getting to know each other. Then during the last couple weeks of [the class], we would be comfortable enough to actually get down to work. However, in the cohort, once we got through that initial phase, we've been able to go through all the other ones productively.

Participants also reported frustrations about participating as learners in the closed cohort, citing differences in age and experience, use of online activities, and lack of cohort norms as problems. Data suggest that their concerns did, indeed, impact learning opportunities within the cohort.

Differences in age. The two oldest cohort members used the word "outsider" to describe their relationships to the group and stated during interviews that they purposefully refrained from speaking too often during cohort sessions. Both held advanced degrees and had engaged in a number of previous educational programs throughout their careers. As mid-life adults with grown children, they recognized the differences in perspectives and priorities they had compared to their younger cohort peers. They also shared frustrations about how the curriculum was developed, classes were conducted, and assignments were given. During cohort sessions, however, both informants actively engaged in activities with their younger peers. They conducted themselves as knowledgeable team players and did not allow their frustrations to emerge. Nonetheless, they believed that age differences hampered their learning.

Differences in experience. One veteran teacher believed that inexperience was a handicap for the newer teachers in the cohort: "They do not have enough background knowledge to do some of the course work and are learning how a school works as we go." Another veteran practitioner explained that perceptions and understandings differed for those pursuing advanced graduate degrees and offered a suggestion to improve future cohorts.

> I also feel that people who are working on a master's degree versus people who are pursuing more advanced degrees and certification see the world very differently. Twenty years of teaching compared to three years of teaching bring very different philosophical ideas and degrees of passion and commitment. Grouping of cohorts may need to be a consideration in the future.

Online activities. The integration of telecommunication technology into the curriculum generated a wide range of assessments. Although most students identified having their own cohort subconference within the university's communication system as an asset, the use of online conferencing as an instructional tool received mixed evaluations.

Some students loved sharing personal disclosures through e-mail messages because they perceived that the virtual-communication mode created "anonymity" or a form of protection. Comparison of online messages and observations of cohort meetings during the opening months of the program showed marked differences in peer interactions. Many students exchanged personal information, religious convictions, and problems of professional practice via e-mail messages, but did not engage in similar talk during cohort meetings.

When asked at the close of the study why the differences in peer interaction occurred, many students explained that they perceived virtual communication as a risk-safe environment that did not exist in the cohort at the beginning of the program. Other participants did not like online sharing because they preferred face-to-face interaction in class. However, a few students felt threatened by the required public sharing via online exchanges and did not engage in the online assignments because they had not yet developed needed rapport and trust with their peers. During the focus group interview, one participant shared her reasons for not engaging in online activities.

> I was a little guarded during all that online stuff. I read everybody's messages, but I didn't share that much. Looking back on it now, I realize that I read and thought about the messages. It was enriching for me, but it wasn't so enriching that I wanted to share.

Cohort norms. While most participants reported that they enjoyed working in small groups, the way the teams formed created divisive undercurrents within the cohort. The issue moved to the forefront following the intensive schedule during the summer semester. Comments made by informants during the July interviews and responses written on the August questionnaire included references to the problem of a "clique" within the cohort.

The most troublesome problem identified by participants was the lack of cohort norms that established acceptable group behavior. An experienced teacher wrote that she was "distracted by a small group of classmates who talk when others are speaking and seem to exclude others from their group." During an interview, another experienced teacher spoke at length about the same concern.

> I speak for several cohort members when I complained about the issues within our cohort, such as teaming and respect for one another. It has been obvious that some members of the cohort are divisive and, for a lack of a better word, rude in their treatment of peers and instructors. We should not have to wait so long for instructors to step in and initiate some resolution. This has been very frustrating for several cohort members.

Another informant identified the strategy for small group formation used by the first two instructors as counterproductive to cohesive cohort development. He thought that instructors should have explained to students that an "objective is [to] work with someone different" on each project. Because students were allowed to self-select their small groups, he noticed that some cohort members consistently became "leftovers" during the selection process. The informant believed that getting to know everyone in a professional preparation program was important.

> The basic idea is that you work with someone you've never worked with before. That gives some real hands-on experience that you [need] when walking into a school where you've never been. . . . At some point in time, all of us will be principals, and we really should be learning to work together. . . . In business schools they teach you to network, network, network, network; in the educational system that's missing.

The small group that formed the clique was easily observed during cohort meetings. The students regularly sat together and often talked to one another throughout classes--even during presentations by instructors, peers, and guest speakers. Most members of the clique were younger male teachers and special education teachers.

Another frustration voiced by participants was the late arrival of their peers to cohort sessions. Although the group decided on the second night of the program to move the class

starting time forward 30 minutes, only half the cohort members habitually arrived on time. Participants wrote comments on questionnaires about how distracting and frustrating it was to have late arrivals to every class. Observational field notes showed that some students regularly arrived from 15 to 30 minutes late. Although the habitual lateness of students was frustrating for the instructors during the last two content domains, they could not break the consistent tardiness despite trying different tactics.

Implications. Empirical evidence generated from studies about cohorts in educational leadership programs suggest many benefits for students, which is supported by similar findings in this study. One unique feature of this inquiry, however, was that it traced the cohort's early development and collected learner assessments in real time and during transition points. Thus, data reflect stages of the cohort's group development.

Diverse district affiliation within the cohort membership provided opportunities for expanded understanding about the educational system within the larger metropolitan area. Participants cited collegial sharing, new professional relationships, and networking opportunities as positive outcomes of their cohort experiences. Conversely, differences in age and teaching experiences created dynamics that became problematic for some practitioners focusing purposefully on their professional development. Barnett and Muse (1993) found that careful screening and selection of cohort students create more cohesive and interdependent cohorts. Therefore, balancing the advantages and disadvantages of diverse membership is an important implication for future cohort development.

Data indicate that the absence of group-determined norms led to unacceptable peer behavior (i.e., cliquishness and tardiness) that students believed hindered their learning. Like this study, Teitel (1995) also found evidence of cohort cliquishness and exclusionary practices while conducting an action-research project about the status of cohorts at an eastern university. Interpersonal problems and conflicts among students are two disadvantages of using cohorts in educational administration programs (Barnett et al., 2000). Because using the cohort model "does not ensure a true cohort will develop" (Basom et al., 1995, p. 19), careful attention must be given to group processing at the beginning, and throughout, a cohort program.

Cohorts provide excellent opportunities for practitioners to learn and practice skills in corporate goal setting, community building, conflict resolution, and culture management (Kelley & Peterson, 2000; Milstein & Krueger, 1997). However, using the cohort model requires program cohesion, and thus, a faculty must be involved in identifying and implementing critical elements that generate optimum learning environments for both faculty and students (Barnett et al., 2000; Kelley & Peterson, 2000). Effective use of the learning cohorts in higher education requires collaboration and more work for faculty (Barnett & Muth, 2000).

This case study spanned three major transitions during the cohort program, which generated data about the turning points through student reflections and researcher observations. The progress from one content domain to another appeared to be more like separate courses than components of one cohesive program because instructional strategies and requirements changed dramatically with each change of instructor. These differences were evident in the students' assessments of the content domains at the close of the study. Findings support the need for expanded research about faculty roles in cohorts (Barnett & Muth, 2000).

Although this investigation was a yearlong mixed-methods case study that integrated multiple data sources and quality checks, the case selected was only one cohort within a university's educational leadership program. While findings about cohorts are similar to findings from research on other principal preparation cohorts, the participant sample (n=18) was small. Additional research using cross-cohort comparisons within the same university program is needed before recommendations about program modification can be made.

Further, measuring transference of learning in a cohort to professional practice as school leaders may be difficult, perhaps even impossible. Accountability about effectiveness of professional development programs requires data beyond statistical information (passing rates on exam scores or career placement) and anecdotal data from graduates. Longitudinal studies are needed to trace the transference of learning in cohorts to graduates' professional practices.

Case Study Summary and Conclusion

This exploratory study described and analyzed the professional growth of 18 educational practitioners while participating in a principal preparation cohort program that focused on

collaborative leadership. The main unit of analysis was a closed cohort within an urban-university's administrative leadership program conducted in partnership with a local education agency. The case study was bounded in time, from January 2000 to December 2000. It began at the cohort's orientation and continued through completion of the initial three of four content domains. The inquiry, guided by researcher propositions, explored and analyzed participants' career aspirations, leadership self-awareness and understanding, conceptualization of the principalship, and socialization into the community of practice. Additionally, program effects that stimulated professional growth and real-time student assessments of learning in a closed cohort were examined.

Five important findings emerged from the study and reflect important implications for the professional preparation of future schools leaders. First, career aspirations of educators in the program appeared to link with level of learner engagement. Second, multiple factors stimulated personal awareness of leadership potential and feelings of competency to assume a school principalship. Further, data suggest that encouragement and support by mentors within the community of practice enhanced leadership awareness and development of aspiring principals. Third, educators' role conceptualization of the principalship is related to the number of years teaching experience: The longer a practitioner works in the field of education, the broader the understanding about the roles and responsibilities of a school principal. Fourth, experiential learning and interaction with practicing administrators are critical to the socialization process in principal preparation. Finally, the cohort was the environment from which many stimuli emerged to prompt professional transformation. However, while the cohort model may stimulate collegial support and enhance learning, initial and ongoing community-building activities are needed for optimum learner benefit. Differences in ages and professional experiences of students also can negatively impact learning opportunities in a cohort.

Data indicate that practitioner growth while participating in a principal licensure cohort depends upon multiple factors directly and indirectly related to the program. Practitioners' reasons for pursuing licensure as a school principal are associated with their degree of engagement as learners and role-identity development as future school leaders. The K-12

principalship is changing to meet complex societal and educational issues, and thus, role conceptualization is difficult for many aspiring principals. Therefore, experiential learning must be the core element of principal preparation to ensure needed skill development and socialization into the community of practice. Career counseling is needed for aspiring principals, especially for women, to assist teachers as they make the transition from classrooms to administrative offices. Using the cohort model requires careful attention to community-development and norm-building processes.

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